# Federalism and Caste Representation
## In Post-Revolution Nepal

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Photo by Niranjan Shrestha/Associated Press

# Key Take-Aways

Following the People's War and the promulgation of a new federal constitution in 2017, a large contingent of historically underrepresented Nepalis became politicians. This was especially true for the Maoist party, who nominated castes from historically excluded groups – especially Janajatis.

However, while nominees, candidates, and eventually elected officials were more representative of the population, this greater representation did not provide greater access to earthquake reconstruction funds for underrepresented groups. However, having a fellow Janajati elected to a leadership position helped alleviate this discrepancy.

Politician education seems to be the main channel affecting the constituent benefits. More educated politicians were better able to direct benefits to households in their wards. Our data allow us to estimate the causal impact of a more highly educated politician, which is large and positive.

# Background

Nepal's armed struggle from 1996-2006 ended the 240 year old monarchy. In 2015, following the deadly earthquake that rocked the country, a new federal constitution ushered in multi-party federal democracy. The Maoists who led the revolution were able to compete in the 2017 elections at all levels of government. At the same time, municipal governments were delegated more powers and responsibilities under the new constitution, paving the way for electoral outcomes at local levels to impact households directly.

# Data

We use data from the post-disaster needs assessment census undertaken after the 2015 earthquake, combined with a list of nominees for political office provided by the electoral commission. Our final dataset contains 2,562,008 individuals across 11 districts, as well as 15,523 candidates and 4,029 elected representatives. We also conducted a survey of 705 party selection committee members. Part of this survey included a special computer-assisted survey, called an Implicit Association Test, which provides a measure of bias against certain castes, education levels, or genders. We combine these data with data on earthquake reconstruction transfers. These data shed some light on how historically excluded castes were represented in the 2017 elections, and how caste identity, education, and bias helped (or hindered) household's ability to access earthquake reconstruction benefits.

# Results

## Representation

1. **Janajati representation improved during the 2017 election**. Janajati's made up a similar percentage of the pool of nominees as they did the general population.
2. However, **Janajati's were less likely than elite castes to be nominated for leadership positions** (Municipal Mayors or Ward Chairpersons).
3. **Selection committees with more Janajatis also had nominee pools with more Janajatis**. This could be because they directly recruit more Janajatis, or because Janajatis are more likely to put their names forward if they know the committee selecting them is more like them.
4. **The Maoist party was an important conduit for Janajati representation**. 60% of Maoist party nominees were Janajati, vs. 40% for the United Marxist-Leninist (UML) or Nepali Congress (NC).
5. **Elites were generally over-represented, but this is likely due to being richer and more educated**. Approximately 3 in 1,000 Janajatis were nominees for a political position, vs 3.7 in 1,000 elites. However, once we consider who selection committees actually chose as candidates, both groups are roughly equal in representation, considering the differences between groups with respect to education and income.

## Education

1. **Janajati nominees were better educated, on average, then the general population**, but less well educated than other castes' nominees.
2. **Maoist nominees were less educated than other parties** (though still more educated than the general population). However, those Maoists who ran and were elected were slightly better educated than their UML peers.

## Bias

1. **Committee members across all parties have some bias in favor of elite castes,** but Janajati members are *less* biased.
2. **Maoists are just as biased as all other parties**. However, Maoist Janajatis who serve on selection committees are less biased than Janajatis from the other two main parties who served on selection committees.

## Benefits

1. **Janajati households receive lower reconstruction benefit payouts than elite caste members**, even when they share the caste of the Mayor or Ward Chair, though doing so lessens the discrepancy. Janajatis do worse but connected Janajatis don't do as badly.
2. In close elections, **highly educated Ward Chairs can redirect more benefits to their constituency** than lower-educated opponents.

# Figures

## The Maoist party was an important conduit for Janajati representation.

In the figure below, the transparent black bars represent the share of the general population in each caste group, while the blue-hued bars represent the share of politicians in each group. A solid bar that extends above the black bar indicates that that caste group was *over* represented. A solid bar below the corresponding black bar indicates a caste group was *under* represented. All three parties were over-represented by elite castes (Brahmin, Chhetri, and Newar groups). The Maoist party (far right) was proportionately represented among nominees, while their elected representatives were disproportionately Janajati.



Figure SEQ Figure \* ARABIC 1: Politician Caste Representation
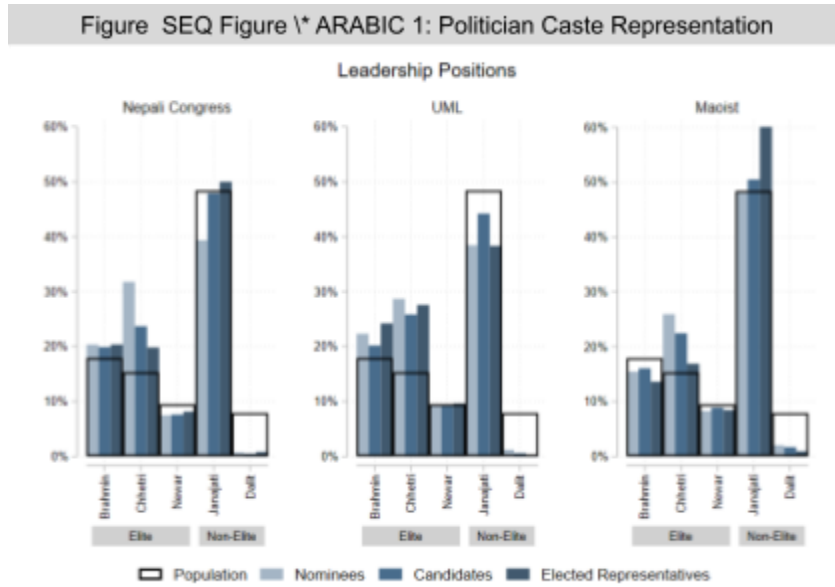
## Maoist nominees were less educated than other parties

Similar to the above, black bars represent the proportion of the population with the corresponding level of education, while solid bars are the share of politicians with that level of education. All parties had politicians disproportionately more educated than the general population, but maoists were slightly more in line with the general population.



Figure SEQ Figure \* ARABIC 2: Politician Education